

FROM THE ARCHIVES by Robin Rudderow

Rose Gaffney (1895 to 1974) An Original from Bodega Bay

A treasure trove was recently donated to RBHS by the family of Nancy Conzett, an RBHS member who passed away several years ago. For a time Nancy was editor of the local newspaper Bodega Bay residents enjoyed from 1987 to (c) 2007, *The Bodega Bay Navigator*. She was President of RBHS, worked on the Call House gardens at Fort Ross and managed the bookstore at the Tomales Regional History Center.

Nancy's extensive collection includes newspaper clippings, letters, photos and other documents about Rose Gaffney and PG&E's plan to build a nuclear power plant on Bodega Head. In the collection are details that have been lost in the many retellings.

So as our Archivist, I have selected items from Nancy's collection to share with you, our RBHS members. For example, the Balloons story featuring Lu Watters in this RBHS Fall 2018 newsletter, was lifted from Nancy's collection -- just one excerpt from the story of how our tiny town fought off the giant PG&E and halted construction of a nuclear power plant.

For nearly a century, land owners ranched Bodega Head. From the 1860s to the late 1950s three ranches were on Bodega Head. Kee Ranch, the northern-most parcel on the Head, was nearly 380 acres. In the middle was the Gaffney Ranch at 408 acres. The 160-acre Campbell Ranch was at the southern tip, jutting into the Pacific to the west, curving inland to form today's Campbell Cove.

In 1916 as a young woman, Rose found her home at the Gaffney's Bodega Head ranch as hired help to do housework. Eventually she married one of the Gaffney brothers. When he retired from ranching they moved nearby to Salmon Creek. But Rose loved the ranch and returned often to search the dunes for Indian artifacts and enjoy the beauty of Horseshoe Cove.

Enter PG&E backed by all levels of government, with 'fake news.' In the early 1960s PG&E filed a lawsuit to condemn nearly 65 acres of the Gaffney Ranch for the power plant. The battle was on. Even though PG&E offered more money than Rose thought the land was worth, she fought the notion of the nuclear power plant with wires strung across the channel to Doran Beach.

She made PG&E work to take her land.

Though 90% of the people of Bodega Bay were opposed to the power plant, a Rohnert Park businessman welcomed PG&E and labeled opponents "nitwits and crackpots." The Sonoma County Counsel formally opined that most residents sided with the Board of Supervisors and those who didn't were influenced by lying outsiders. *Hmmm. Name calling and accusations of fake news. Sound familiar?*



One article in Nancy's collection speculates something I often wondered. Despite plans since 1956 by the faculty of UC Berkeley to build a marine research facility on Bodega Head and quiet grumbling by the faculty when the nuclear power plant was proposed, the University did not formally oppose the PG&E power plant. The Atomic Energy Commission's Chairman, Glenn Seaborg had been the Chancellor at Berkeley. Over half of UC Berkeley's budget was from subsidies for atomic research. It seems likely that UC Berkeley administrators overruled protesting faculty members to keep the money coming for atomic research.

Formed in 1962, the *Northern California Association to Preserve Bodega Head* petitioned the State Public Utilities Commission to reconsider the permit previously issued for the power plant. Despite the PUC President's objections that building a power plant was a travesty on nature and that the safety of the power plant was questionable, the PUC voted 4 to 1 to refuse a re-hearing for PG&E's permit. However, the

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Association 's newsletter told of the lost vote but also offered a glimmer of hope, a report by Dr. Pierre St. Amand, geologist and expert on earthquake hazards. His report determined "*the probability of actual fault displacement on or near the [nuclear power plant] site is high.*" He discovered a fault running right through the reactor pit. In the 1906 quake, areas nearby had moved as much as 15 feet. In his report, the geologist wrote that he couldn't imagine a worse spot for a reactor.

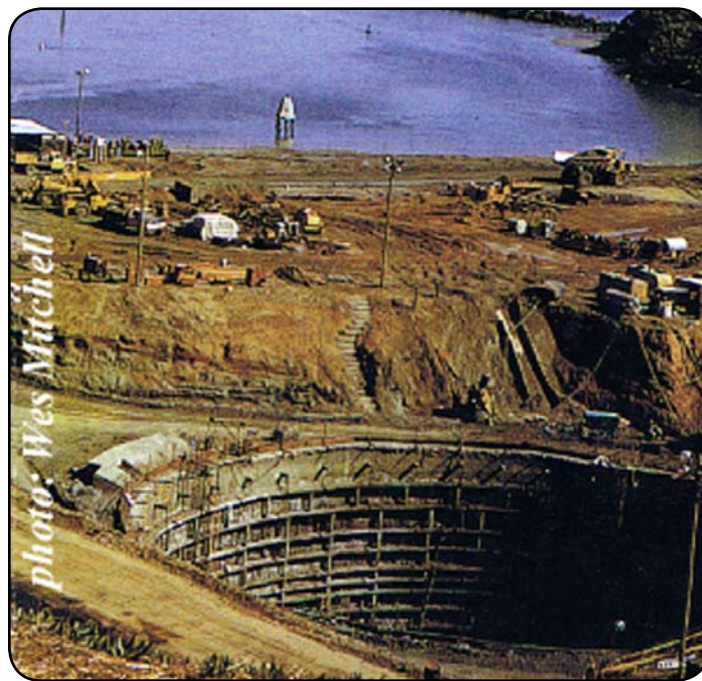
Pressure was mounting for PG&E. To defend its position in 1964 PG&E called a press conference to put forth its own earthquake experts. One stated "locations near active faults often provide better foundations for structures from the standpoint of earthquake hazards than locations farther away." Another said the plant couldn't be destroyed by an earthquake. But if it were hypothetically destroyed, it would shut down before "releasing deadly fallout on the Bodega area." These "faulty" opinions did little to bolster PG&E's position. But the "deadly fallout" took another form, boosting the locals to release balloons with notes inside that showed the fallout would easily reach Marin County.

The Tides Turn. By the end of 1964 the ruse was up. Dr. St. Amand's report reached the highest levels of the federal government. Highlighted by the catastrophic 1964 Alaska earthquake. The Atomic Energy Commission staff said they had a reasonable doubt about safety. With that PG&E withdrew its application for the power plant. But by then Rose had lost her lawsuit and was forced to sell 64.9 acres to PG&E for \$64,900. When PG&E gave up the idea of a power plant they offered to sell the land for four times what it paid Rose. She was mad! She tried to get the property returned to her without success. In February 1979 the land was purchased by the State of California for \$500,000.

The University of California and the State Parks sued to acquire the rest of Gaffney Ranch. The court directed UC to pay \$334,750 for 326.3 acres and State Parks to pay \$40,905 for 90.9 acres. Rose was satisfied and said she actually offered to settle for less than she was awarded. Rose said later that she had no objection to selling the ranch; her father-in-law had purchased it in 1863, her husband had been dead since 1941, and she was "land rich but pocket poor." "Moderately wealthy"

after the sale of Gaffney Ranch, Rose continued to live in her modest Salmon Creek home. She enjoyed visits from journalists and curious conservationists from around the country and the world. Even 10 years after *The Battle of Bodega* was over, a journalist called her the "*Mother of Ecology.*"

Rose parlayed her contacts from the PG&E days to look for a home for her impressive collection of Indian artifacts but was never successful. Her old friend August Sebastiani, who had tried to purchase Rose's collection while she was alive, purchased it from her heirs in 1980 after her death in 1974. The collection was displayed in a small museum at Sebastiani winery until 1987 when it was divided up. Some of the stone artifacts were purchased by Richard N. Carrow and some were distributed to an associate of the Sebastiani family. The rest of the collection, largely bone and shell artifacts, was received by anonymous individuals.



The legacy of PG&E leaves us with "The Hole in the Head" and the road to Bodega Head now known for hiking and stellar whale watching. Rose's memory lives on at Gaffney Point where the white pelicans flock and where Alfred Hitchcock created Mitch's (Rod Taylor) and his mother's (Jessica Tandy) ranch house, where the UC Davis Marine Lab dormitories, stand among a cluster of Cypress trees. ●